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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

10 April 1985

Hu Yaobang Moves to Shake Up China's Propaganda Apparatus

Summary

Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang is moving to bring the frequently troublesome propaganda apparatus more tightly under his control, [redacted]

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[redacted] One of his principal aims is to reduce the influence of Politburo member Hu Qiaomu and Propaganda Department Director Deng Liqun, who have shown themselves at odds with important aspects of the reform program. At the same time Hu Yaobang appears to be working to increase the role of his close associate, Secretariat member Hu Qili, in ideological matters. [redacted]

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Resistance to Reform

On numerous occasions the propaganda apparatus has shown a willingness to challenge important aspects of the reform program; frequently Deng Liqun and Hu Qiaomu appear to have instigated or supported these challenges. Although initially sympathetic to the reformers, since at least 1982 both Deng Liqun and Hu Qiaomu have been identified with a conservative group that has developed strong misgivings about the direction of some social and economic reforms. [redacted]

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Hu Yaobang signalled his dissatisfaction with propaganda work in a major speech to propaganda cadre last November. This speech, which People's Daily subsequently published in four parts as an unattributed commentator's article (a more polished, slightly altered version was also published in the theoretical journal Red Flag in February), took the

This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] China Division, Office of East Asian Analysis. Comments and questions are welcome and should be directed to the Chief, Domestic Policy Branch at [redacted]

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propaganda organs to task for allowing the errors of the past to persist. Hu told the propaganda workers that:

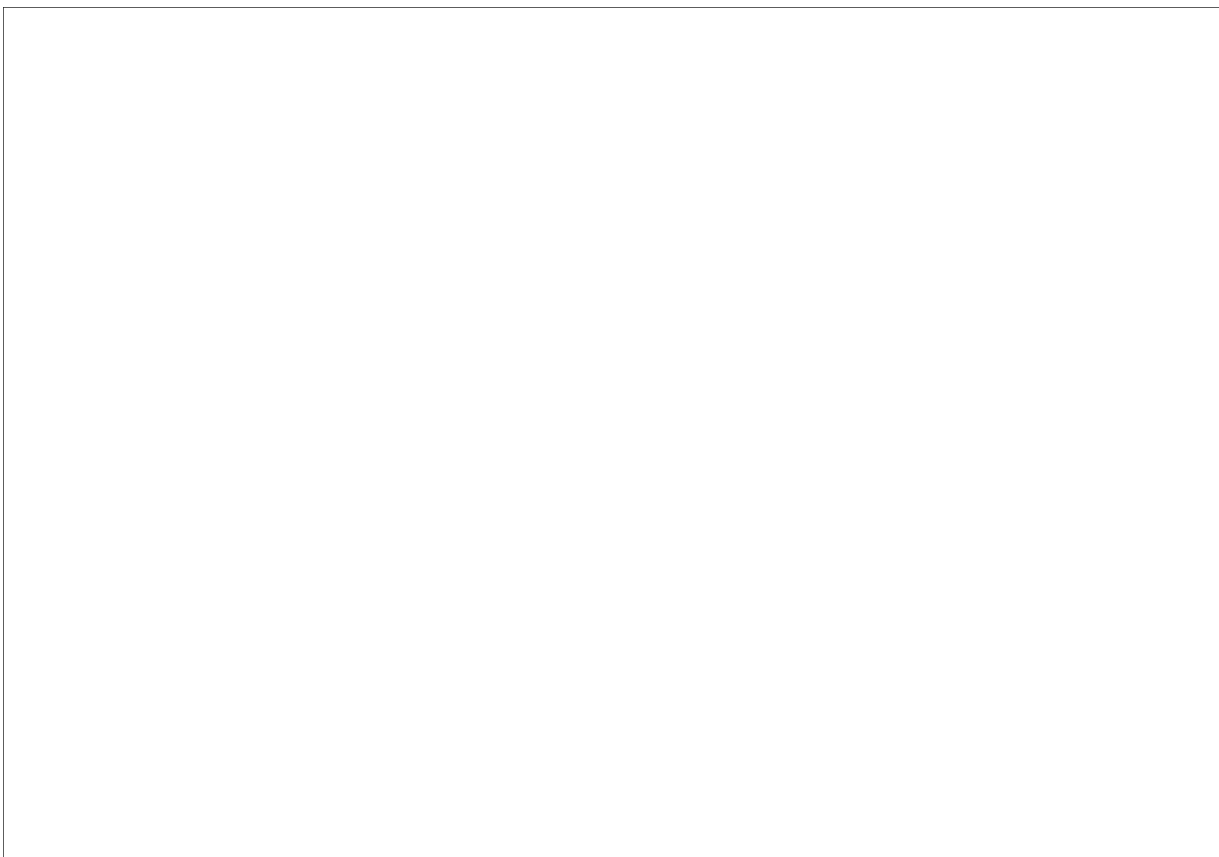
- It is wrong to equate ideological work with ideological struggle.
- Propaganda workers should never underestimate the influence of leftism in the ideological field.
- A good propagandist combines theory with practice--and "practice" in China today means the four modernizations.

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In his speech, Hu told the propaganda cadre that they should concentrate on studying economics for three to five years. We believe that many propaganda workers, who typically are ideologically conservative and lack specialized training, will resent this dictum. It will probably add to existing concerns in the propaganda sector over the correctness of the reform program.

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Last December's national writer's conference provided further evidence of aggressive reformist action to control propaganda workers. Hu Qili did the preparatory work (overruling plans set in motion by the Propaganda Department,) and delivered the key speech

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at the conference. By contrast, neither Deng Liqun nor Hu Qiaomu were present at the meeting, although they sent greetings. The reading of their greeting messages was met with silence, but the announcement of their absence got enthusiastic applause. []

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Fallout from the Spiritual Pollution Campaign

[] Deng Liqun and Hu Qiaomu have been held responsible for the excesses of 1983's "spiritual pollution campaign," which moved from a fairly specific criticism of certain theoretical trends to become an assault on "corrupting" foreign influences of all sorts--and soon began to undermine reformist economic principles. []

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After Deng Xiaoping decided or was persuaded to end the campaign, there were widespread rumors that Deng Liqun would lose his post as propaganda chief. Deng has held on to his position, however, possibly because of the protection of senior party conservatives like Chen Yun. He has, nonetheless, had a much lower profile in the past year; []

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[] In January, Economic Daily announced that Deng Liqun had been appointed head of a new central leading group on cadre education; this appointment may be a sinecure designed to ease Deng's transition from the propaganda directorship. The fact that all four of his deputies in the new post are staunch reformists strengthens this interpretation of the appointment. []

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Outlook

The reformist recasting of the propaganda apparatus will certainly encounter opposition from cadre who fear a loss of influence, are uncertain about their new role, and see the reforms as ideologically suspect. The reformers appear to be aware of the problems and have begun an aggressive campaign to address them. We do not think it likely that the ideologues can mount a direct challenge to the reform leaders, but they have repeatedly demonstrated an ability and a willingness to disrupt the implementation of reform, put reformers on the ideological defensive, and cast doubt on the wisdom or success of certain reform measures. Despite Hu Yaobang's attempts to control this problem, we expect that elements of the propaganda apparatus will retain the potential to annoy Hu and his allies and occasionally threaten reform progress. []

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